

# METHODS AND IDEAS FOR THE CREATION OF 'TRANSPARENT' MUSIC IN THE CLASSROOM

A folio of compositions submitted  
for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

by

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## **Abstract**

Methods and ideas for the creation of ‘transparent’ music in the classroom

The aims of this port-folio are as follows;

- To provide a coherent sequence of pieces and methods which can be used to create music in an educational context and also encourage students and teachers to develop their own creativity.
- To provide pieces which develop student’s confidence in their own ability to create music in a variety of ways including composition, improvisation and creative leadership.
- To provide exercises and pieces which help to develop the listening and appreciation skills essential for ensemble musicmaking.
- To provide methods that enable the creation of ‘transparent music’. This is music in which the some, or all, of the decision making involved in the creation of a piece is accessible and apparent to an audience during its performance.

This submission consists of a teaching book containing thirteen pieces/exercises, instructions giving guidance on their possible use in a teaching context and recorded examples. Also included are separate instructions where appropriate for the use of pieces in a concert or other non-educational setting and two essays giving context and background information on the ideas behind the pieces.

# Teaching Book

## Introduction

The pieces included in this portfolio are intended not only to provide players with an exciting performance experience, but also opportunities to develop the range of skills needed to be a confident creative musician. They are aimed at performers of varying abilities, from the experienced to the absolute beginner, and I hope to show that no matter what our level of musical knowledge we can all enjoy creating and performing our own music.

All pieces include the score and some suggestions for how they could be taught and/or rehearsed. There is also guidance on how to adapt and develop the ideas in these pieces to encourage performers to stretch their musical imagination, and create their own unique and original pieces of music.

It is my opinion that there are some skills needed to be confident in improvisation or composition, which can easily get overlooked in a traditional instrumental education. Not because they aren't important but because it is not always obvious how they can be taught. This portfolio attempts to address this issue by highlighting the relevant skills, making them the focus of the music, and outlining ways in which they may impact on a performers wider music making.

I hope that all the pieces included are enjoyable to learn and to perform and moreover that they inspire players to create new pieces and ways of making music of their own.

# Folio of Compositions

Methods and ideas for the creation of ‘transparent’ music in the classroom

## Abstract

## Teaching book

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### Introduction

#### **‘City/Cat/Balloon v2’**

*A quick and easy idea using images to help create an effective piece for beginner ensemble*

#### **‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears’**

*Some ideas on the use of a story to help create a simple ensemble piece*

#### **‘Short/Wavy/Smooth’**

*A fun exercise introducing the idea of improvised conducting*

#### **‘Who’s in Charge?’**

*A piece developing the idea of improvised conducting*

#### **‘Listening Game #2’**

*A game piece designed to test the listening skills of a beginner ensemble*

#### **‘Amalgam’**

*An intermediate piece for percussion ensemble exploring the differing roles of players within the group*

#### **‘City/Cat/Balloon v1’**

*A more elaborate version of the idea, incorporating improvisation*

**‘A Serious Talk’**

*A more advanced piece using a story and incorporating improvisation as an essential part*

**‘The Way Things Are’**

*A solo piano piece based on a poem by Roger McGough, another way of using text to inspire music*

**‘Playing the band’**

*A method for creating a piece using improvised composition*

**‘Some things are more important than money’**

*A piece for more confident improvisers where the relationships between musicians become the score of the piece*

**‘What we do’**

*An exploration of the traditional roles of musicians in a small jazz ensemble*

**‘Improv Listening Game #1’**

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## **Appendices**

**1. Alternative instructions for the use of certain pieces in a non-educational context**

**2. Two essays outlining the context and thinking behind this submission**

2a. Wider Opportunities Music Teaching  
*‘Composition and improvisation in the classroom.’*

2b. The idea of ‘transparent’ music and the issues I am trying to address

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## **‘City/Cat/Balloon v2’**

This is an example of a quick and easy way to use pictures to help create a piece. The version included here is only one example of the kind of result that can be achieved. The city, cat and balloon categories chosen in this version are largely arbitrary, although they should be different enough to prompt varied musical responses and still be connected enough in some way to enable pictures to be found of all three things together (this is not as easy as it might at first appear!).

### **Composition**

As this is intended as a relatively quick piece to put together I would try not to get bogged down in too much background work at the beginning. There are many aspects of the piece that may prompt discussion from the children, such as matching music to pictures (how does cat music differ from balloon music etc.) but I would try to save these for later in the process and dive straight into creating the music. I would begin by dividing the children into the three groups necessary for the piece (a city group, a balloon group and a cat group) and then possibly dividing them into smaller groups within these for the initial composition stage.

At this point it is useful (although not essential) for the children to have some knowledge of basic rhythmic notation. Preparation work with rhythm flashcards or similar will achieve this relatively quickly. The children can then be given a selection of rhythms that they already know, and a selection of notes to choose from when composing their ideas.

This version of the piece was written using glockenspiels which meant a relatively large range of notes was available, but teachers using other instruments can select the notes to suit their pupils. Somewhere between 3 and 6 notes is probably ideal. The children can then be shown some of the pictures, just those where the items appear alone to begin with I suggest. This can prompt some discussion of possible aspects that could be reflected in the music (big, busy cities, playful, cute cats, beautiful graceful balloons etc.). The children would then be given time in their small groups to come up with musical ideas for their category using the rhythmic and pitch options available to them. These could then be performed to the rest of the groups and some ideas selected to keep and use. In the selection process it may be possible for a teacher to keep everyone happy by combining elements of different groups ideas so that everyone feels as though they are contributing something. Once this process is complete the teacher should write down the definitive versions of the music for each category and these should be adhered to, by and large, and treated as the score for future performance of the piece.

## **Performance**

Once the musical ideas for each category have been decided they should be rehearsed until they can be played in unison by all members of the relevant group on command. The children should then be shown the slide show for the piece with all the pictures. At first they should simply try to identify when their group should play (by raising their hand for example). This is easy when there is only one item in the picture but may cause some confusion when there is a balloon cat, or a cat in a city etc. Once it is explained that this means both or all three groups will play together, the method of performing the piece is I hope simple to grasp. Some more rehearsal may be necessary however to co-ordinate the playing of the three parts and a teacher can help by keeping a pulse on a cowbell or other similarly easy to hear instrument. Once the three parts can be played separately and in combination the piece is ready to be performed.

The changing of the slides can be controlled by one of the performers, or by another separate individual, but should not be pre-set before the performance. Whoever is responsible for changing the pictures should use their musical interpretation to do so at what they feel are appropriate times. When performing in front of an audience, the pictures need to be visible to both players and audience.

One of the intentions of this piece, and a by-product of using pictures as part of a score, is that it forces the children to get their heads up rather than focussing solely on their hands and instrument. This is a particular problem on tuned percussion where children find it hard to resist checking every note. In rehearsing this piece the speed of change between sections should be emphasised so that there is no gap in the music. This forces the children to really focus on the pictures and keep their eyes up on the screen.

This piece gives pupils an easy introduction into creating their own music and is a fun, if slightly unusual performance piece. There is plenty of scope for developing and extending the ideas, some of which I will return to in later pieces.

## **‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears’**

This is an example of how a story can be used to create a piece of music. This is a fairly common idea, especially in music written for children and it really allows children to explore their creativity. The use of a known story is in some ways useful, as it can speed up discussions about characters and plot etc. but really any fairly short story with a selection of characters will do.

### **Composition**

The aim of the exercise is to translate the children's ideas about the plot and characters of the story into music. This will require not only discussions about the story but also work on the instruments developing new sounds or techniques which may come in useful. Ideally these two processes can go along side by side. It is often tempting for a teacher to lead these explorations in certain ways but it is important to emphasise that each person's interpretation of, for instance, what 'scary' or 'angry' music might be is equally valid. As adults our interpretations are conditioned by years of experience and the children will often have a considerably different frame of reference. This can lead to some suggestions that seem unlikely or unusual but I think this is to be encouraged. The biggest danger for a piece such as this is that it becomes a series of sound effects and clichés composed by the teacher rather than the children. It is far better to have a piece which genuinely reflects the pupils' ideas, even if it doesn't sound anything like what we may have expected.

In the course of these discussions of the story and explorations of the instrument, a teacher should note down ideas for certain parts and gradually assemble a score for the piece. This may take several sessions as more and more elements become set each time. It is useful to try not to have too many different musical ideas. One for each main character and possibly a theme or idea depending on the particular story is enough. These can then be used as starting points and varied according to the situation.

### **Performance**

Once the musical ideas have been composed it is a question of co-ordinating them with the story. I like to use narration as it helps the audience to appreciate the musical interpretation and also allows the children to perform without a score. It is often possible for a selection of children to narrate and also play in the same performance. Although all the pupils should rehearse all the musical elements they have composed, it is often necessary to divide them



into groups, especially if two or more characters/musical ideas are present at the same time. In this case it is useful to keep the same groups and musical roles each time the piece is rehearsed (one group for mummy bear, one for daddy bear, one for baby bear for example).

Performing with the narration of the story necessitates accurate responses from the players. They have to play the relevant bit of music at the right time for the piece to make sense. Within each idea though a certain amount of freedom is possible. It is perhaps not necessary for all the children representing a particular character to play in precise unison. There can be some scope for children to vary certain elements of the music such as tempo or dynamics according to their individual response. This is useful for groups who struggle to keep a steady beat or co-ordinate different rhythms at the same tempo.

The teacher should try to keep the children thinking about how their playing fits with the story and make sure they are always supporting and not overpowering the narration.

Performing a piece of music with the narration of a story is an easy way for children to appreciate how music can create the different moods and emotions present in the text. This is a fundamental part of their development as creative musicians. It is also a fun way, especially in primary schools, of helping to hold the attention of the audience for the whole duration of the piece!

## Short, Wavy, Smooth

This is a useful way of introducing the ideas of improvised conducting. It can be done with or without instruments and with varying levels of complexity. It not only encourages the children to think creatively about sound and music, but it also develops the focus of the the group as they have to watch extremely carefully to catch every signal. The process starts with the instrumental teacher demonstrating the actions that represent these different sounds;

**Short** = an exaggerated throwing action perhaps with both hands, throwing the sound against the back wall of the classroom,

**Wavy** = holding both hands out in front of you (like a zombie) then shaking them,

**Smooth** = a circular motion of the hands, palms down, as if polishing a table. These should be demonstrated first without sound. The teacher can then begin to make vocal sounds to match the signals, and gesture for the children to copy these (for example short = Bang!, Wavy = Blululululu etc., Smooth = shhhhh). It will be clear that they are only to make the sound together with the appropriate signal.

Once this has been achieved there are multiple options for development. Children should be encouraged to conduct/create pieces themselves, taking turns to make the signals whilst the rest of the class make the sounds. Children can be split into two groups with the conductor using one hand for each. This enables the layering of different sounds or the distribution of rhythms between the two groups. Extra signals can be added, an ostinato for instance can be signalled by drawing an imaginary circle in the air with a pointed finger, creating the opportunity for more simultaneous groups. Dynamics can be signalled in various ways, by the raising or lowering of the hands, or the distance that two hands are held apart.

This exercise can segue smoothly into work on one of the more complex pieces using improvised conducting. Or it can be used separately as a good way to start a session focussing on creativity. It can also be tailored to focus on a particular area to be worked on i.e. pulse and rhythm, texture, timbre, dynamic control etc.

These methods of conducting and improvising with sounds may also inspire ideas for new signals from the children and these should be encouraged and added to the repertoire. Quite quickly an extremely complex system of musical creation can emerge, but if it happens organically and is led by the children they will develop a feeling of ownership of it, and tailor it to fit their ability. Used in conjunction with more complex, and/or notated material, this can often be a good way of developing small musical fragments into something suitable for performance.

## **‘Who’s in Charge?’**

This is an example of one way of putting improvised conducting into practice in a performance situation. Allowing children to take turns playing and conducting/creating the music is a great way of boosting their confidence and making them think about elements of music such as structure, texture and form that they might not normally consider.

### **Composition**

The notated material for this piece can be provided either by a teacher or by the pupils themselves. This piece requires a slightly higher degree of musical experience than the previous ones so pupils at this level may be able to come up with their own short phrases. Material can also be found, asking children to select 2-4 bars from a favourite piece for example, anything is suitable provided its of a manageable length. The real creativity in this piece comes in the manipulation of the material to produce the music.

### **Performance**

This piece is ‘constructed’ anew for each performance by an improvising conductor(s). They use a system of simple signals to cue various responses from the players. The following is a list of the possible responses from the players, and the relevant signal used by the conductor;

**Notated parts numbered 1-7** – Conductor holds up relevant number of fingers. The conductor can also beat a bar of time to bring the player(s) in if desired. Performers then repeat the relevant notated section until given another signal or signalled to stop.

**Single short sound** – Conductor holds out a closed fist to indicate short sounds are to follow. Each sound is then cued by the conductor striking their finger against their closed fist. These sounds can be directed at the whole ensemble or a smaller group of players as indicated by the conductor.

**Single long sound** – Conductor holds out an open palm to indicate long sounds are to follow. Each sound is then cued by the conductor striking their finger against their open palm. These sounds can be directed to all or any of the group as above and can be combined with the short sounds.

**Dynamics** – Conductor holds one arm out, pointing vertically upwards from the elbow. They then indicate the desired dynamic moving a finger up and down this arm in the fashion of a slider on a mixer. Pointing to the top of the hand, the highest point vertically, indicates the loudest dynamic whereas pointing to the elbow, the lowest point, indicates a quiet dynamic. This direction can be given before the indication for a player to make a sound, to indicate the dynamic level that the next sound *will be*, after, to alter the dynamics of the music in progress.

Careful rehearsal is necessary to ensure that the maximum subtlety of performance is available to the conductor. Responses to signals need to be precise and immediate. To become really fluent in this way of working will take time, so learning to play the notated material is really only the start of the process. It is easy for this piece to go on longer than the amount of material necessarily justifies, especially with a large group of musicians, so teachers should lead discussion around issues of form and structure to try and encourage pupils to think of the overall shape of the piece rather than just moment to moment. In a large group it may be necessary to limit each child's conducting time or allow only a certain number of conductors. As pupils become more comfortable working with these signals they will transition in their conducting from doing things to see what response they get, to thinking of the music they want to hear and then trying to produce it. It is this creative and immediate use of a musical language, to replicate ideas in their heads, that is to be encouraged and nurtured.

## **‘Listening Game #2’**

This is an example of a musical game designed to test and improve pupils listening skills. When children are in the first stages of learning an instrument they have an awful lot of information to take in and retain. Lots of this will be to do with technique, how to make a good sound, or any sound at all, on their chosen instrument. As a result, one area that can be overlooked is the pupils listening skills and their awareness of what's going on around them. This becomes especially crucial if they are learning in a large group where ensemble skills are a vital component right from the beginning of their education.

### **Composition**

The categories and rhythms contained in this version of the piece are only suggestions and there are any number of ways to come up with different ones. Children could be split into groups and asked to come up with a category and its rhythms, or categories could be suggested by other work or topics relevant to the children at the time. The only stipulation being that each rhythm within a particular category is unique. Once the rhythms have been chosen however it is important that they are adhered to accurately. This piece is designed for pupils who have a basic level of rhythm reading ability, some work with rhythm flashcards or similar is good groundwork.

### **Performance**

Players should first be grouped into four teams. Each team is then given their music which they must keep secret from the other teams. On each part are five rhythms, one for each round of the game, and the category title of each of these rounds. The five categories are as follows; Ice Cream Flavours, Breakfasts, Sports, Holiday Destinations and Animals. Each team is given a different rhythm to play relating to these categories, for instance in the first round Team 1 plays the rhythm of the word Vanilla, Team 2 plays Strawberry, Team 3 Raspberry Ripple and Team 4 Toffee Fudge. The words/phrases for all team's rhythms should be displayed for all players to see, or announced at the beginning of each round. The rhythms are then played simultaneously and players have to try and identify which group is playing which word/phrases. It is important that all players have a clear knowledge of the 4 rhythms being used before the start of each round or they won't know what to listen out for. If necessary, players should practice each rhythm in unison before individual parts for each team are assigned. Points are awarded to the teams for accurate identification of the other team's rhythms, with extra points being awarded or deducted for accurate or inaccurate performance of their own rhythms at the discretion of the teacher/conductor.

A little competition is often a good way to focus the minds and improve the efforts of children in the classroom. As such, this piece should be performed as a kind of quiz with points available for correct answers at the end of each round. Appointing one child in each group as team captain with responsibility of writing down the answers is an effective way of keeping track of the responses. It is important to try and keep calling out to a minimum whilst the answers are being discussed. Point out to the noisier participants that this may give the game away to another, rival group, who may not know the answer at all. As the game progresses, or as the group become more experienced players of it, teachers can begin to point out ways to improve, such as identifying the elements of each rhythm that make it unique or focussing on the group furthest away first.

## **Amalgam**

This is a piece designed to focus players attention on the listening skills necessary to play accurately and effectively in an ensemble. By co-ordinating the different rhythmic parts of the music with movements around the stage it also creates an exciting visual element, which makes it a fun and dramatic piece to perform.

### **Preparation**

Although the musical elements of the piece are set, thought needs to be given to the instrumentation and what is essentially the choreography of the piece. The performance space should be taken into account in rehearsal and it may even be possible to incorporate some elements of the stage into the music.

### **Performance**

This piece can be played on any un-pitched percussion instruments at the discretion of the conductor. Thought should be given however to their portability however as some movement of the players during the performance is necessary. Any amount of players doubling each part is permitted.

Players should be arranged in a semi-circle so that everyone can make eye contact with everyone else. During the piece, when players have separate rhythms they should move and face away from each other, without making eye contact, to make their separation from the other musicians clear. When they have the same rhythm they should group together, facing each other, and make very obvious eye contact. Players may move around the stage as they and the conductor see fit to do this.

The two aspects that need to come across for this piece to be effective are the accuracy of the rhythms, especially when they change, and the movement and change of focus of the players so that the number of different groups playing simultaneously are evident to the audience. To achieve the first of these will require dedicated rehearsal of each rhythm separately and then together before working on the piece as a whole. The second aspect also requires dedicated, separate work, perhaps with players 'walking through' their parts, going over the moves around the stage or changes of direction of attention, without playing any music. It is important throughout all these rehearsals to emphasise how *really* listening to the other members of the ensemble will improve the performance, and discuss what parts of the music players think they should focus on at different times etc. It is often enlightening to hear different pupils talk about how easy or difficult they find it to hear different parts of the music. This not only helps them to develop their ensemble skills but may also effect how teachers work with these pupils in the future.

## **‘City/Cat/Balloon v1’**

### **Instructions**

This piece is to be performed in a similar manner to the earlier one of the same name, and using the same set of pictures. The aim of the piece is again to improve the listening and general ensemble skills of the players involved.

As before the score consists of three short musical ideas, one representing each of the three items named in the title. It is to be performed alongside the accompanying slide show containing pictures of these items in various combinations. The music representing each item should only be played in response to the presence of said item on the screen. In this version players should decide before the performance on a order of priority for the images so that all relevant music is always heard. For example one player would prioritise Cat over the other two, and always play the cat music when one was present in the image. Their second priority could be balloon, so they would play balloon music if there were no cats. City would then be their lowest priority and they would only play the City music when the image was of a city alone. Players need to take account of the effect on the balance and orchestration of the group caused by these decisions.

The notation forms the basis for the music but performers should interpret this in response to the images on screen. The way they play the same material should be different to reflect the different pictures. When two or more musical ideas are being played, players should try to make the relationship of the music correspond to the relationship of the items in the picture, in whatever way they see fit.

The changing of the slides can be controlled by one of the performers, or by another separate individual, but should not be pre-set before the performance. Whoever is responsible for changing the pictures should use their musical interpretation to do so at what they feel are appropriate times. Gaps in the music should be avoided at the changing of pictures, players need not switch musical material instantly but should do so as quickly as is comfortable. When performing in front of an audience, the pictures need to be visible to both players and audience.

## **‘A Serious Talk’**

This piece develops the same ideas of composing music to a text as the earlier 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' example. It is intended for much more experienced musicians however, and requires improvised interpretation as well as accurate reproduction of notated material.

### **Composition**

The musical material for the characters and themes of this story is set, however there is nothing to prevent a similar process being applied to another text. Careful decision making is required concerning which characters or elements of a story warrant musical material, the music then needs to be short enough and distinct enough to be easily recognizable. Precise annotation of the text is then required to illustrate which musical elements are present at every moment. Once the musical material is set, players should familiarise themselves thoroughly with both it and the text. In the case of this piece, individual players take on the role of representing particular characters and so part of their preparation would be to rehearse how they are going to interpret their character through the notated material in response to the events of the story.

### **Performance**

All rehearsal marks are cued by members of the band as indicated in the score/parts. All repeated sections between these marks can be played as many times as each player chooses and need not be co-ordinated between the members of the ensemble. Players can choose to move on to the next repeated section when they like, but cannot move onto the next rehearsal mark until it is cued. If the next mark is cued and a player hasn't yet played all the repeated sections, these should be missed out and he/she should jump to the cued rehearsal mark.

Within each repeated section players are expected to start by playing as written, but as they repeat they should gradually begin to improvise around this material. Some of the sections set more of the music than others, so the amount of improvisation and speed at which it develops will vary. In all parts slash lines ( / / / / ) indicate that the player should continue what they are doing, the part should continue to develop on its own terms irrespective of changes (such as tempo) in other parts.

### **The story;**

The piece is based on a short story by American author Raymond Carver (see copy included) with musical material representing the main characters and themes of the story as I see them. The structure of the music also follows that of the story with the characters and themes entering and overlapping as they do in the text. At each new entry an indication is given on the parts of which character or theme the following section of music is intended to represent. The intention is for all players to read the story as part of their preparation for playing the piece, and that their interpretation of it will influence their improvisation. Player's improvisations should reflect their take on the character or theme they are representing at any given point in the piece. Players should also attempt to convey the nature of the interaction between characters and themes in their improvisation. They should take into account how the character is behaving, and how they are



interacting with other characters, and reflect this in their interaction with the other players in the ensemble. The copy of the story included is annotated to match the structure of the score (letters match rehearsal marks and numbers indicate the various repeated sections between these marks). It is therefore possible to match each section of music to the very specific section of text that it is designed to represent.

Once each performer has a strong grasp of the text, their characters and how they will represent them musically, the task of rehearsing the piece becomes one of co-ordination. Making sure that everyone is at the same point in the text and fulfilling their correct role is vital to the understandability of the piece for an audience. Rehearsing with a narrator or with a projection of the text is a good way to achieve this, even if the decision is made to perform the piece without them. As the players become more comfortable in the structure of the piece and how it develops they will be more able to allow their interpretation of their material to be influenced by the improvisation of others. This process of trying to maintain a distinct, individual voice whilst interacting with and responding to the voices of other musicians is one that many improvising musicians will recognise as an important aspect of their playing.

## **‘The Way Things Are’**

This piece is another development of the idea of composing music to a text. It is intended for a single experienced musician and again requires improvised interpretation as well as accurate reproduction of notated material.

### **Composition**

The musical material for this piece is set, although in each section varying amounts of improvisation are required. Whilst detailed rehearsal of the notated material may be necessary, it is important to try and avoid the improvisatory elements becoming set during this process. The piece should be a combination of the written material and the performers interpretation of the text, as they see it on a particular day, in a particular space with a particular audience.

### **Performance**

The piece is to be performed alongside the slide show which contains the text of a poem by Roger McGough. This should be projected so that it is visible to both the performer and the audience. The changing of the slides, which reveal the poem one line at a time, should be cued by the performer. This can be done either by the equivalent of a page turner responding to a signal from the pianist, or directly by the performer themselves if this can be arranged to their satisfaction with a convenient button, pedal or similar.

The focus of the performer in this piece should be on how they can best communicate their interpretation of the poem through music to the audience. It may be useful in this regard to improvise responses to individual lines of text, ignoring the notated material of the piece at first and then incorporating it later. It is also important to consider the impact of the text as a whole, how it flows and how meaning is added with the accumulation of stanzas.

The notated music contains deliberately different and often disjointed material and the role of the performer is to be the consistent thread who, through their interpretation and personality, makes a the piece a coherent whole for the audience. This seemingly ambitious task is one familiar to many improvising musicians who are constantly trying to craft their influences, inspirations, interpretations and practised material into a coherent solo.

## **‘Playing the Band’**

*for ensemble of 5 or more instruments and director. Ideally a combination of single line melody instruments, chord playing instruments and un-pitched instruments.*

This piece is an extension of the improvised conducting ideas used in the earlier 'Who's in Charge?' piece and 'Short, Wavy, Smooth' exercise. It uses more slightly more extensive notated material including sections with distinctly different characters. These are also divided into parts (melody, harmony, bass, chords and rhythm) which allow for more subtle and precise layering and combination of elements by the conductor.

### **Composition**

The notated material in this example is again only a suggestion of one possible version. In this case it contains three ideas but there is no reason it shouldn't contain more. Each section needs to be fairly short and as distinct from the others as possible in order for it to remain recognisable even in combination. The division of the ideas into their constituent parts should be notated accurately rather than left to the interpretation of the players. In this piece all the improvisation is done by the conductor.

### **Performance**

The idea for this piece is that the director improvises with the band as their instrument. In a very direct combination of composition and improvisation the director re-organises the composed material into a new piece for every performance. The players themselves don't improvise, playing the notated music as accurately as possible whilst responding to the signals of the director.

The musical material of the piece can be used in any order or combination, overlapped or organised in any way at the discretion of the director. The piece need not start with section 1, in fact the score is not intended to suggest any particular form or structure for the piece, this is improvised by the director. Once a particular section has been cued, *players should continue to repeat this section until they get another signal*. Different parts can be cued at different speeds and the players should endeavour to keep to these tempos as other parts are introduced.

The director needs to be able to cue the various sections of the music quickly and accurately. A suggested set of signals are as follows. Any of these signals can be given to any member or members of the ensemble;

- Hold up relevant number of fingers for the desired section of music (1, 2 or 3)
- Indicate one or more of the following parts (one part per instrument but more than one player can be directed at the same time);

**Head** - Tap on your head.

**Chords** - Hold out one hand with the back of your hand facing the musicians so that your fingers and thumb resemble the musical stave.

**Backings** - Tap on your back.

**Rhythm** - Hold out the palm of one hand and hit it with the index finger of the other. Then hold up the relevant number of fingers to indicate the point in the rhythm the player should repeat from. (It is important to make sure the player understands the order these signals are given in order to avoid playing the wrong section of music)

**Bass** - Point to the ground

- Then *conduct 1 bar into the music* at the desired speed.

The director should also be able to shape the dynamic level of the ensemble, raising and lowering their hands to indicate a respective change in dynamics. These signals should obviously be made clear to the players in rehearsal and should be repeated as necessary in performance until the director is sure they are understood. It is essential that the signals are given clearly to the intended players and this may influence the arrangement of the ensemble in the space.

Players of single line melody instruments directed to play the chord part can choose to play any note from each chord. Any player directed to play a part that is written out of the range of their instrument should play in a comfortable register, closest to that of the written part. The rhythm parts are intended to be un-pitched. Pitched instruments instructed to play a rhythm part should make some un-pitched sound. This should ideally be with their instrument but where this is not possible clapping, tapping on a music stand or similar is fine. Percussionists or other un-pitched instruments instructed to play pitch material should play the rhythm of this material and make the contours of the pitches if at all possible.

This piece essentially enables elements of composition to be controlled in real time. Conductors should be encouraged to think about aspects such as form and structure as they would in traditional composition, and use the range of musical possibilities available to them accordingly. As the piece is rehearsed, and players and conductor become comfortable with the material, the conductor should endeavour to imagine the piece they want to hear and then attempt to create it, rather than waiting to see what happens when they give a certain set of signals.

They should also be encouraged to be as creative as possible with the material, challenging the players to respond in a way subtle enough to match their imagination. This may also encourage the expansion of the language of signals, much like in the earlier pieces, and this is again to be encouraged.

This piece is about exploring how a limited amount of musical material can be manipulated and developed into an extended piece, an idea at the heart of a lot of traditional composition, and the experience gained by a conductor doing this live in a performance may influence their thinking when they next sit down to compose in a more leisurely fashion.

## **‘Some things are more important than money’**

This piece is a development of the ideas raised by the earlier piece 'Amalgam'. Again the focus is as much on the shifting relationships between the players as on the music. The only real distinction being that this time the players are asked to improvise and develop their material, and the fact that they will not have seen the music before the performance. This element of sight-reading and, and the necessity of developing extended improvisations from limited material, suggests that the piece is more suited to more experienced, confident players, although there needn't be anything technically challenging about the piece.

The same kind of preparation with regard to the performance space, and ability of players to move around within it, should be made as before.

### **Composition**

This piece requires that the notated material which provides the basis for the players improvisation be composed anew for each performance. In practice at least two versions are required, one for rehearsal and one, unseen by the players, for the performance. This could be achieved in several ways. One person could compose all the material, each player could be asked to contribute a certain amount of material which is then collated by a non-player and assigned to different members of the ensemble, or material could be found, or lifted from existing pieces. The latter of these is the least desirable as it raises the possibility that a player will recognise the material they are presented with which will inevitably influence their interpretation of it.

### **Performance**

Each player needs 6 cards marked 1 to 6, each containing a short extract of music. In each case the cards should be different, with the exception of card number 4 where all but one of the players should have the same material. The musical extracts should be suitable for the intended instruments in terms of range, technique etc. but any musical material is permitted. *The musical material on the cards should not be made known to the performers prior to the performance.*

The piece requires that the ensemble at times be divided into smaller groups, both duets and quartets. These should be decided in rehearsal and made clear to all performers. With an odd number of players a trio can replace a duet or quartet at the discretion of the director.

Prior to the performance the director also needs to decide on the players who will form the duet in Section C of the piece, and consequently the player from this duet who will become the soloist in sections D and E. This will inform the design of the cards as the material on card 3 of the players not designated to become the soloist will be reproduced on card 4 of all the other members of the ensemble. The decisions regarding duet and soloist should also not be made known to the performers prior to performance.

What constitutes the score of this piece is essentially the structure of the interactions between the players. It is this structure, and each individuals role within it, that the rehearsal process should focus upon. Players should know at all times with whom they are improvising and the conductor should only serve as a reminder in this regard. Once this is achieved, every attempt should be made to make the changes in relationships between the players as visually apparent to an audience as

possible. Movement around the stage and changes of focus of attention can all be rehearsed without playing.

By forcing players to develop, in a performance setting, music they have never seen before, this piece can provide players with an insight into their own playing, and how they manipulate material. As well as how this process is affected by other musicians. It also gives an audience an insight in the ways improvising musicians alter their playing based on the music going on around them.

## **‘What we do’**

This piece is in many ways an extension of the ideas in the earlier 'Listening Game #2'. This time focussing the attention not just on the different parts of an ensemble, but on their roles within it. It highlights the way that players in a small jazz ensemble improvise within the boundaries of certain roles. In a 'standard' performance these roles would normally be associated with certain instruments; time keeping from the drums, walking patterns or pedal points from the bass, melodic or harmonic comping from the piano or chord playing instrument, and a melody or improvised solo from the lead instruments. This piece distributes these roles equally throughout the ensemble with each instrument potentially fulfilling all of them in the course of a performance. The piece requires an understanding of the relevant musical vocabulary, but players are free to interpret terms such as 'walking bass' or 'melodic comping' as they see fit within the instructions of the piece.

### **Composition**

There is no notated material for this piece but the assigned roles of the different instruments carry a wealth of musical meaning. A walking bass line, or the comping under a solo can be played an infinite number of different ways, and each player should investigate their own interpretation of the different roles before starting work on the piece.

### **Performance**

The choice of which roles are to be played, and on which instruments, can be made in two ways. First, an improvising conductor can cue the players with simple signals, holding up the relevant number of fingers to match the parts on the score. Otherwise, players can choose their own roles, but should illustrate which they intend to play each time they start playing or change roles, with a similar hand signal. This makes some of the interaction between the players, normally achieved subtly with eye-contact alone, accessible to the audience as they learn what the different numbers represent. The piece ends at the discretion of the conductor if there is one or of the players, much in the manner of a free improvised piece.

The use hand signals, either by a conductor or the players themselves, to illustrate the role they are currently taking in the ensemble serves two purposes. It illustrates effectively how different players view each assignment, and makes the distinctions clear to an audience who can quickly pick up the meaning of the signals. In an educational context it is often enlightening to let a younger, or less experienced player conduct an ensemble of more experienced players in this piece. That way they are able to see directly how the players respond to the changing musical environment and their place in it. This piece is also designed to stretch players by asking to fulfil roles they may not be accustomed to. How comfortable is a lead instrument when playing a walking bass? How does the drummer react to being the melodic focus in a solo?

## **‘Improv Listening Game #1’**

*for improvising quartet and conductor/umpire*

This is another game piece designed to test and develop players recognition of the music going on around them. It is intended for more experienced musicians as the notated material is of greater difficulty and the piece also requires improvised interpretation. Experienced players may think that their appreciation of the music around them when they are playing is pretty good, but when put on the spot in a situation like this they may be surprised at how difficult a game this is.

### **Composition**

The notation given is again only an example of a possible version. The three sections of music were carefully composed however so that all parts of both versions (A1 and A2 for example) would 'work' together, so as not to make the distinctions between them too obvious. They each also have their own distinct feel which increases the variety in the piece and can make a difference to how comfortable players are.

### **Performance**

The game starts with the player to the left of the conductor playing one of the three calls. These correspond to the following section of music, so the first call will indicate that section A is to follow, the second cues section B and the third section C.

The call is played as a solo, and only once. The musicians then begin, at the tempo set by the call, to play the material from the relevant section. They can choose to play either variation 1 or 2 and are free to swap between them at the beginning of each new repeat.

The aim of the game is for the players to identify when all members of the quartet are playing the same variation (i.e.; B2). If they think this is the case they should stop playing half-way through their repeated part (after 2 bars). Other players who don't agree should continue until the end of the 4 bar section and then stop. At this point the conductor asks each player which variation they were playing to find out who was correct (this element of the game, like many games requires a level of honesty, however any disagreements should be settled by the conductor whose decision is final).

Each player begins with three lives and loses one for each wrong decision. So, if player 1 stops midway through, and it turns out everyone was playing the same variation, all three of the other players would lose a life. However, if any of the players were in different a variation, the player 1, who stopped after two bars, would lose a life.

The game then begins again with the next player, in a clockwise direction from the first, playing a call. This can be either of the two sections that were not just being played (it is not permitted to finish playing the B section and then immediately play the call for the B section again).

Any mistakes by the players, such as playing the same call as the section that's just finished, playing a different section than indicated by the call, stopping in the wrong place etc. can be penalised by the loss of a life at the discretion of the conductor. The game can be played either until



the first player has lost all three of their lives, or continue until all but one of the players has lost their lives.

At the beginning of the game the musical material should be played exactly. As mentioned above, the tempo is variable (set by the caller) and the players are free to vary the dynamics, but the notes and rhythms should be adhered to as strictly as possible. As the game progresses however, in each subsequent section, players should begin to improvise and move gradually away from the original material. This should be a subtle process, and any movement too far away from the material, or that is deemed to be too sudden can be ruled upon by the conductor. By the end of the piece however, the players should be free to improvise and take their ideas as far from the original material as they choose.

First rehearsals of this piece will inevitably focus on the logistics of it, when to stop, how to decide who was right and wrong, and it will quickly become apparent that two different players can be equally sure that they both heard two different things. The role of a conductor/umpire with the score is crucial to settle these disputes! It will also become obvious just how difficult the game is. Players need to be completely confident in their own parts, and ideally have looked at the other parts, in order to make play effectively. Once this is achieved, the tactical use of improvisation to disguise the details of the music becomes of greater importance. If the piece is to be performed with an audience then the conductor must find a way to effectively translate the necessary information about the piece to them. A short explanation before the piece starts, perhaps with the players illustrating 'correct' and 'incorrect' answers should help. Some kind of display of each players score is useful.

This piece is not only a real challenge for the listening skills of those involved, even a non-playing conductor with the score may find it difficult to rule accurately at times, but it also makes players aware of how improvisation can change *how* they listen, which may influence their playing in more conventional settings. It also provides an illustration of the way different people focus their attention, perhaps some instruments or players are easier or more difficult to hear, consistently mistaking the part of a particular instrument might suggest a broader listening tendency.

The focus when working on this piece should be on the game aspect rather than the music. If the game is played to the best of everyone's ability this will produce the most satisfying results for players and audience alike.

This piece explores how musicians listen when they are playing. Do certain players find it easier to identify certain parts? Does the game become harder or easier when the players are improvising, and does this alter the listening process? The answers to all these questions will be different for each performance, and each individual player.

The piece also allows the audience to see some of the processes going on in the minds of the players, both in demonstrating how they listen, and also how they choose to improvise around their music. As the piece progresses and they get to know the musical material the audience should feel as though they can 'play along'. This can be assisted, if deemed necessary, by preceding the performance with example playings of the sections as they sound with all the instruments together. What the players and audience should 'listen out for' so to speak.

## **Appendix 1.**

Alternative instructions for the use of certain pieces in a non-educational context.

## **Appendix 2a.**

Wider Opportunities Music Teaching

‘Composition and improvisation in the classroom.’

## **Appendix 2b.**

The idea of ‘transparent’ music

## **Appendix 3.**

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